

Appl. No. : 10/747,812  
Filed : December 29, 2003

#### AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A process for manufacturing and filling flexible pouches, the process comprising:

producing filled, flexible pouches at a rate of at least 50,000 pouches per hour in a continuous processing line, the step of producing each pouch comprising:

grasping a neck portion of a preform with a positive transfer system;

maintaining positive control of the neck portion with the positive transfer system as the preform is advanced through blow molding, filling, closing and placing processes;

blow molding [[a]] the preform having a neck portion into a flexible, non-self-supportive pouch having the neck portion and an average sidewall thickness of between about 0.003 to about 0.010 inches (about 0.0076 to about 0.025 cm); and

filling said flexible pouch with a desired product;

closing or capping the filled pouch; [[and]]

placing the filled pouch in a rigid container prior to being released from the neck portion by the positive transfer system; and

releasing the neck portion of the filled pouch from the positive transfer system,

handling the neck portion throughout the process[[.]]

wherein the neck portion of the preform and pouch are used to handle the preform and pouch throughout the process.

2. (Original) The process of Claim 1 wherein said process further comprises decorating and/or dressing the pouch.

3. (Original) The process of Claim 2 wherein said pouch is filled prior to decorating and/or dressing of the pouch.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) The process of Claim 1 wherein said rigid container is a box.

7. (Original) The process of Claim 1 wherein said pouch has at least one layer.

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8. (Original) The process of Claim 7 wherein at least one layer comprises polyethylene terephthalate or polypropylene.

9. (Original) The process of Claim 1 wherein said pouch has one or more exterior layers comprising a material selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, modified polyolefins, modified elastomers, polystyrene, thermoplastic polyurethane, copolyester barrier materials, phenoxy-type thermoplastics, polyamides, polyethylene naphthalate, polyethylene naphthalate copolymers, polyethylene naphthalate/polyethylene terephthalate blends, polyethylene terephthalate, compatibilized polymer blends, and combinations thereof.

10. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for making and filling flexible pouches comprising:

a handling system that is adapted to convey a preform and a flexible, non-self supportive pouch produced from the preform by a neck portion through manufacturing, filling, and packaging systems and releasing the neck portion thereafter;

a manufacturing system comprising a blow molding machine, wherein the manufacturing system is adapted to blow mold the preform into the flexible pouch having an average sidewall thickness between about 0.003 to about 0.010 inches (about 0.0076 to about 0.025 cm);

a filling system adapted to receive the flexible pouch and further adapted to fill and to close or cap the flexible pouch, the filling system comprising:

a filling machine; and

a closing or capping machine; and

a packaging system adapted to place the flexible pouch into a rigid container.

11. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said blow molding machine blow molds a preform with a neck into a flexible pouch having a neck.

12. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said filling machine fills a flexible pouch with a desired product.

13. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said closing or capping machine closes a filled flexible pouch.

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14. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said apparatus further comprises a system which decorates and/or dresses the flexible pouch.

15. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 14 wherein said system which decorates and/or dresses the pouch is placed before the filling system.

16. (Canceled).

17. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said packaging system is adapted to place the flexible pouch into the rigid container before the filling system.

18. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said rigid container is a box.

19. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said pouch has at least one layer.

20. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 19 wherein at least one layer comprises polyethylene terephthalate or polypropylene.

21. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 10 wherein said pouch has one or more exterior layers comprising a material selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, modified polyolefins, modified elastomers, polystyrene, thermoplastic polyurethane, copolyester barrier materials, phenoxy-type thermoplastics, polyamides, polyethylene naphthalate, polyethylene naphthalate copolymers, polyethylene naphthalate/polyethylene terephthalate blends, polyethylene terephthalate, compatibilized polymer blends, and combinations thereof.

22. (Currently Amended) A process for manufacturing and filling flexible pouches, the process comprising:

placing a preform having a neck portion into a handling system;

maintaining positive control of the neck portion with the handling system through the steps of blow molding, filling, closing or capping, and placing;

blow molding the preform into a flexible pouch having a average sidewall thickness between about 0.003 to about 0.010 inches (about 0.0076 to about 0.025 cm) that is not self supportive;

filling the flexible pouch with a desired product;

closing or capping the filled pouch;

placing the pouch in a rigid container prior to releasing the neck portion; and

releasing the preform neck portion of the flexible pouch from the preform handling system.

~~wherein the handling system handles the preform and pouch by the neck portion throughout the process.~~

23. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 22 wherein said process further comprises decorating and/or dressing the pouch.

24. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 23 wherein said pouch is filled prior to decorating and/or dressing of the pouch.

25. (Canceled).

26. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 22 wherein said pouch is filled prior to placing the pouch in a rigid container.

27. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 26 wherein said rigid container is a box.

28. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 22 wherein said pouch comprises at least one layer.

29. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 28 wherein at least one layer comprises polyethylene terephthalate or polypropylene.

30. (Previously Presented) The process of Claim 22 wherein said pouch has one or more exterior layers comprising a material selected from the group consisting of polyethylene, polypropylene, modified polyolefins, modified elastomers, polystyrene, thermoplastic polyurethane, copolyester barrier materials, phenoxy-type thermoplastics, polyamides, polyethylene naphthalate, polyethylene naphthalate copolymers, polyethylene naphthalate/polyethylene terephthalate blends, polyethylene terephthalate, compatibilized polymer blends, and combinations thereof.

31. (New) A process comprising:

producing a plurality of filled, flexible pouches at a rate of at least 50,000 pouches per hour in a continuous processing line, the step of producing each flexible pouch comprising:

providing a preform;

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blow molding the preform into a flexible pouch having an average sidewall thickness between about 0.003 to about 0.010 inches (about 0.0076 to about 0.025 cm); and

filling the pouch with a desired product.

32. (New) The process of Claim 31, wherein the flexible pouch relies on collapsibility for drainage.
33. (New) The process of Claim 31, wherein the flexible pouch is a multilayer pouch.
34. (New) The process of Claim 33, wherein the flexible pouch has a foamed, outer layer.
35. (New) The process of Claim 31, further comprising placing the filled pouch in a rigid container.
36. (New) The process of Claim 31, wherein the step of producing further comprises handled by a neck finish throughout the step of producing.